



There are few typographical errors to detract from the flow of the language. Probably the most irritating one to the author and publisher would be on the Content page where the *Viscaceae* is listed as *Visaceae*.

All in all, this is a wonderful book and I recommend it strongly to all land managers and field naturalists. To all bushwalkers and gardeners in southern Australia, this is a book of interest and will, no doubt, deepen your appreciation and love of the Australian bush and landscape. In some situations management and control of mistletoes is necessary, and the book gives clear advice on how such management can be achieved. Congratulations to all concerned.

**Malcolm Calder**  
375 Pinnacle Lane,  
Steels Creek,  
Victoria 3775

## Forest Phoenix: How a great forest recovers after wildfire

by David Lindenmayer, David Blair, Lachlan McBurney  
and Sam Banks; Photography by David Blair

Publisher: *CSIRO, Collingwood, Victoria, 2010. 128 pages, paperback.*  
ISBN 9780643100343. RRP \$39.95

This is such a good book. I know that a reviewer should avoid such emotive language, but it couldn't be helped. This is such a good book.

The logical sequence of the book is compelling, starting with an introduction based around the 2009 wildfires in the tall montane forests immediately north and east of Melbourne. The reader is led from a gut reaction at the fires' ferocity and apparent destructiveness, into an appreciation of the characteristics of such huge conflagrations and the post-fire environment. The next chapter is a positive ramble through forest regeneration, thence to animal recovery. The last chapter discusses the various changes that human settlement has brought to these forests — changes in the ecological impacts, intensity, ubiquity and long-term effects of our involvement with these forests. As a result, the reader is led into the contentious issues (fire management, logging, carbon storage, water yield, biodiversity conservation) only after considerable insight into forest processes has been

gained. This is an even-handed and informed consideration of the issues involved in these forests. Polemic and partisanship are virtually non-existent, allowing readers to bring their own perspective to a consideration of these issues. Would that all political controversies were so carefully, thoughtfully and respectfully treated.

The illustrations are a highlight of the book. 'Every picture tells a story' is as true of the illustrations in this luxuriously illustrated book as it was of *Doan's Backache Kidney Pills* in the early 20th century (an early origin for this phrase). In *Forest Phoenix* the pictures are of consistently high quality and none is wasted. The story each picture tells is amply illuminated by the brief but informative text that accompanies each. Indeed, the book is so lavishly illustrated that it's close to a 'coffee table' format and most determinedly not intimidating for the vast majority of us who are not at the forefront of scientific research (as these authors clearly are). Al-



though each picture is clearly included on the basis of the story it tells or illuminates, so many of the pictures could just as easily justify their place in a book on photography as art. With very few exceptions (e.g. page 65, as discussed below), all pictures are remarkably consistent in format and composition. The book is a coherent whole.

Of course, those of us with a long-standing interest in some aspect of natural history will find some gaps in the story told through these pages. This reviewer would have appreciated more consideration of the ecological effects of seed banks, plant regeneration and growth and the options that are available to landscapes. For example, a consideration of why Mountain Ash trees can only regenerate after fires seems a bit of an oversight (their seeds are so small, have so little stored 'food', that they must be self-supporting and photosynthesize almost as soon as they germinate, hence they cannot make it through the dense shady vegetation of these forests ... except for that rare opportunity when sunlight gets right down to the forest floor, i.e. straight after fires). But this is nit-picking. Everyone with some familiarity with these forests would shade their story differently. This book is intended not as the last word, but as an introduction. It is eminently successful.

Those of us wishing to interrogate the scientific literature further have been provided with a reference list, but this book is *not* intended as a scientific treatise. The flow of the narrative is not broken by embedded references, charts or tables. There is only one diagram (and even that looks, at first glance, like another photograph).

On page 91 the mention of 'our research ...' overlooks the contributions of so many others who have contributed to the ecological understanding of these forests, but, on the whole, the narrative is gratifyingly impersonal. This book is a story of the forests themselves, not of the researchers nor other workers who have spent so much time therein.

Errors are few, but the following warrant attention.

p. 7 – Red Stringybark rarely occurs in admixture with the other eucalypts listed. Instead it prefers drier sites;

– 'Snow Gum Woodland' is the name often given to stands of *Eucalyptus pauciflora* and the associated plants. However, the photo well illustrates that this vegetation type rarely (never in the Central Highlands of Victoria) forms a true woodland (widely-spaced trees);

p. 17 – '... the vast majority of which **was** killed';

p. 31 – '... as **burrs** in fur ...';

p. 65 – The lower photo is doubtfully *Antechinus agilis*. It looks more like *Sminthopsis leucopus*, or some other *Sminthopsis* species;

p. 111 – 'subsp.' is the appropriate abbreviation for 'subspecies', not 'ssp.';

p. 112 – The Black Wallaby is usually known as *Wallabia bicolor*, not *Wallabia unicolor*.

On a nomenclatural note, it is pleasing that English names for all species are capitalized (as is usually the preference of biologists). There is no option for mammals and birds, but it is gratifyingly consistent that English names of other organisms are also capitalized.

In summary, this book is unreservedly recommended. It is informative, authoritative, comprehensive, accessible and almost as enjoyable as a ramble through these forests themselves. How useful it would be if all our habitats were introduced and explained with such elegance and simplicity.

David Cheal

Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research  
123 Brown Street, Heidelberg, Victoria, 3084  
david.cheal@dse.vic.gov.au